LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN AND THEIR CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON POST NATAL OUTCOMES IN SPAIN

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Resumen
How much influence does cultural identity and acculturation have on the decision making process in birth outcomes in Latin American immigrants in Asturias, Spain?

Due to the ever increasing number of immigrants that now call Spain their home, it is important to gain a better understanding of how cultural identity plays a role in the single most important time in a woman’s life: pregnancy and the decision making process in birth outcome.

In this study, the intentions are to view some of the religious, maternal socialization roles, familistic perspectives, gender roles, marianismo complex(es), taboo in abortion/termination of pregnancy, dangerous stereotypes and acculturation roles of Latina women living in Asturias. Due to the in-depth personal decision making process, the theoretical framework will be based on existentialism and logotherapy. The meaning of life and the power and desire of how we choose to live is both primal and powerful in the process of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood.

As there are no true quantifiable ways to measure the existential questions that persist in life rearing, the most definitive way to establish the sense of cultural identity is to actually “hear the stories”, i.e. through a qualitative study, doing interviews with Latin American women residing in Asturias.

It is hypothesized acculturation and new societal terms will heavily influence the decision making process, perhaps with as much gusto as with cultural influences. The ultimate objective is to gain a better understanding on how better assist in bridging a cultural understanding between all who will eventually reside together.

Palabras Clave: Women, latinAmerican, immigrants, pregnancy, family
Resumen en español

¿Cuánta influencia tiene la identidad cultural y la aculturación en el proceso de toma de decisiones en los resultados del nacimiento en los inmigrantes latinoamericanos en Asturias, España?

Debido al número cada vez mayor de inmigrantes que ahora llaman a España su hogar, es importante comprender mejor cómo la identidad cultural juega un papel en el momento más importante en la vida de una mujer: el embarazo y el proceso de toma de decisiones en resultado de nacimiento.

En este estudio, las intenciones son ver algunas de las funciones de socialización religiosa, materna, perspectivas familiares, roles de género, marianismo complejo, tabú en el aborto/terminación del embarazo, estereotipos peligrosos y el papel de aculturación de las mujeres latinas que viven en Asturias.

Debido al profundo proceso de toma de decisiones personales, el marco teórico se basará en el existencialismo y la logoterapia. El significado de la vida y el poder y el deseo de cómo elegimos vivir es primordial y poderoso en el proceso de embarazo, nacimiento y maternidad.

Como no existen verdaderas formas cuantificables de medir las preguntas existenciales que persisten en la crianza de la vida, la forma más definitiva de establecer el sentido de identidad cultural es realmente “escuchar las historias”, es decir, a través de un estudio cualitativo, haciendo entrevistas con mujeres latinoamericanas residentes en Asturias.

Es la hipótesis de que la aculturación y los nuevos términos sociales influirán fuertemente en el proceso de toma de decisiones, tal vez con tanto peso como con las influencias culturales. El objetivo final es lograr una mejor comprensión de cómo ayudar mejor a unir un entendimiento cultural entre todos los que eventualmente residirán juntos.

Palabras Clave: Mujeres, latinoamericanas, Inmigrantes, embarazo, familia.

1. Introduction

How much influence does cultural identity and acculturation have on the decision making process in birth outcomes in Latin American immigrants in Asturias, Spain?

Due to the ever increasing number of immigrants that now
call Spain their home, it is important to gain a better understanding of how cultural identity plays a role in the single most important time in a woman’s life: pregnancy and the decision making process in birth outcome. As more and more Latin American immigrants arrive to Spain for a plethora of reasons, the societal face of Spain is in a momentous change, and in need for a better understanding of cultural perspectives and how they affect future birthrate change. The massive influx in emigration to Europe, and in particular to Spain via Latin America, rose sharply during the economic boom of Spain, and yet the cultural understanding of Latin Americans residing in Spain has yet to be fully accomplished.

The meaning of life has been, and continues to be, one of the most complex philosophical discussions known to humanity. While it is quite common to question oneself on the meaning of life and its purpose, it will be the intention of this research to study and explore the individual perceptions and personal details on what life means to a specific group; Latin American immigrant women residing in Asturias and their decision making process concerning their pregnancies.

Cultural views within Latin Americans differ greatly, with Latin America comprising of many different countries, and hosting the largest cities in the world. The study will examine some of the demographic variables and cultural factors that hold the most significance to immigrant women while they are pregnant, and the decision they chose concerning the outcome of their pregnancy. The main focus is to view some of the religious, maternal socialization roles, familistic perspectives, gender roles, marianismo complex (es), taboo in abortion/termination of pregnancy, dangerous stereotypes and acculturation roles of Latina women living in Asturias.

Roles and Perspectives of Latin American Immigrant Women

There are many decisions a woman can make regarding the outcome of her pregnancy, and in order to gain a better understanding as to why they make the decisions they make, we must first understand the maternal socialization roles of Latin American women. There are several mainstream beliefs con-
cerning Latin American women, coinciding with the connotations that they are extremely family orientated, and maintain strong matriarchal roles in the family. There are often stigmas, stereotypes, and oppression that are related to Latin American women for being “too promiscuous”, not being a virgin before marriage, and with the ever present understanding that a woman’s place is in the home with her children. It is also widely accepted that while maintaining a household and children, she must also be the support and provide the household with some sort of income. In particular, there is major emphasis being put on women surrounding marriage and child bearing roles. (Opresa & Landale, 2004). The idea in which Latin American women must maintain and juggle all of these roles, all while being an immigrant in a new and foreign country, can be both difficult and daunting.

In the marianismo complex, mothers are revered above all, putting children first in all aspects. The idea that God comes second to a mother’s own child, is often emphasized in societal perspectives, many times with much adoration from society (Carter and McGoldrick, 2005). In this role, there are certain pressures and obligations that a woman must face in order to sacrifice herself to be seen as a “good mother”, in many ways often projecting a position of martyrdom within the family. It is also not uncommon for discussions of motherhood and religion to overlap one another. The societal theory of the marianismo complex is often so embedded into Latin American society, its associations are often made between mothers and the Virgin Mary, so much so, the mere mention of the word “mother” almost invokes a religious response (Carter and McGoldrick, 2005). The deeply embedded cultural factors such as the marianismo complex, and the overall commitment to the family (what is often called familismo) play large roles in the decisions of contraceptive birth control and abortion (Rodriguez and Fehring, 2012). We cannot ignore the role religion also plays in Latin American society, and how much influence it has from a more cultural perspective rather than a religious factor. Included with societal aspects, religion and its significance on
Latin American culture also harbors some influence on the patterns of contraceptive use and elected abortion.

Understanding the cultural and sociological factors of Latin American immigrants and their acculturation process (es) in Asturias, we can assume major cultural and economic hardships entail. These include but are not limited to; lack of economic stability, lack of work, the stress or daily hardships of life, adaption to cultural differences of native Spaniards, racism, etc. In the research, we must also view familial support systems, or lack of them, to help identify some of the factors in the decision making process during pregnancy.

2. Theoretical Framework

Due to the in-depth personal decision making process and the understanding of human purpose, the theoretical framework will be based on existentialism and logotherapy. The meaning of life and the power and desire of how we choose to live is both primal and powerful in the process of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. The Existentialistic framework provides an interpretive view on the meaning of life, exploration of the experiences of pregnancy, the personal benefits and risks of motherhood, and the deep responsibilities of raising a child. As the woman is the undeniable gender that carries the child through the gestational process and the experience of child birth, it is also undisputable it is the woman who makes the ultimate sacrifice to become a mother.

The very essence of Dr. Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy, embodies the retrospective, and not the introspective. Because logotherapy is a meaning-centered therapy, an individual is forced to lose the focus on their most difficult circumstances; and re-focus on what the meaning of their life is, as well as their own purpose. Logotherapy clearly emphasizes the search for meaning is specific to each individual, and only that particular person can fulfill the significance to be satisfied by her own will (Frankl, 1959). In relation to the marianismo complex, we can find an association between the me-
meaningful and purpose-filled time called motherhood; and the emphasis on the meaning of life. A woman is forced to look beyond herself while pregnant, whether this be from a more egocentric perspective, or one that is more allocentric.

A woman, who is an immigrant, is faced with a decision that is embodied in the epitome of what is called life. Her retrospective thoughts on her decision making process coincide with, and are actually confronted with, the meaning of her life and that of her unborn child. Furthermore, the existential and logotherapy frameworks strive to find the deeper meaning of life, however not in general, but rather a more specific purpose at any given moment in an individual’s life. The power of the meaning of life is deemed as the main motivational force in man, influencing all of our future decisions (Frankl, 1959). We can constitute this force has some part in the desire to find one’s life and future more satisfactory; hence the arduous journey of the immigration process.

3. Methodology

There are no true quantifiable ways to measure the existential questions that persist in life rearing. The most definitive way to establish the sense of cultural identity is to actually “hear the stories”, i.e. through a qualitative study, doing interviews with Latin American women residing in Asturias who have either been pregnant, or who have gone through the birthing process locally. Qualitative methodologies in this study offer a “snapshot” of their own personal journey, their pregnancy.

Interviews will consist of various, but concise, topical questions regarding why they choose what they did/or will during the pregnancy and birthing process. Questions will touch on certain circumstances regarding their immigration process, family support systems (or lack thereof), feelings and sentiments of any biases or racial injustices, as well as cultural and religious factors they deem most important. Ages of the Latin American immigrant women will stay within the limits
of 18-40, unbiased to weeks of gestational age if pregnant. Interviews are to be between 45 minutes to 1 hour long, with an estimated number of women of approximately 20 immigrants from different countries belonging in Latin America and the Caribbean Islands. The participant has to be a first generation immigrant, currently residing in Asturias.

The research will be limited to Asturia’s main cities which are Oviedo, Gijon, and Aviles. The main places where potential interviewees are contacted will be in abortion clinics, a volunteer funded religious organization which houses unwed and unfunded mothers willing to carry to full term and give birth to the child, as well as an association helping women prostitutes by providing community and medical resource referrals.

4. Limitations and Outcome

As the study is in process, and results are not yet identifiable, the hypothetical outcomes are believed to show a regularity in patterns of similar cultural perspectives regarding pregnancy and motherhood within the Latin American immigrant population in Asturias. It is also hypothesized acculturation into the host society will heavily influence the decision making process, perhaps with as much relevance as with their own native cultural influences. Religious factors will also hold significance, however religion constituting from a more cultural perspective versus a more devout perspective. Limitations of the study may be encountered within the scope of its participants, as they will be asked in a random and volunteer basis. As the study will explore some of life’s most difficult decision undertaking, limitations may come from variations of personal experiences, fear of “telling the truth”, vulnerability of a pregnant woman in the undertaking of such an in-depth interview process, and lastly, the differences between cross cultural variables of Latin America women from several different countries.
5. Conclusion

Due to the gap in the literature pertaining strictly to the decision making process during pregnancy of Latin American immigrant women in Asturias, there is a need to have research further explore a large, and yet under documented, population residing in Asturias. The understanding of cultural factors regarding life altering decisions, leads to a better and more in-depth understanding of the culture itself, thus bridging the gaps between what is needed for pregnant women concerning the community and medical resources in Asturias. Research also provides extensive comprehension of demographic variables influencing family planning within the Latin American immigrant community in Asturias.

The ultimate objective of this study is to gain a better understanding on how to bridge cultural divides among people and communities.

Bibliografía